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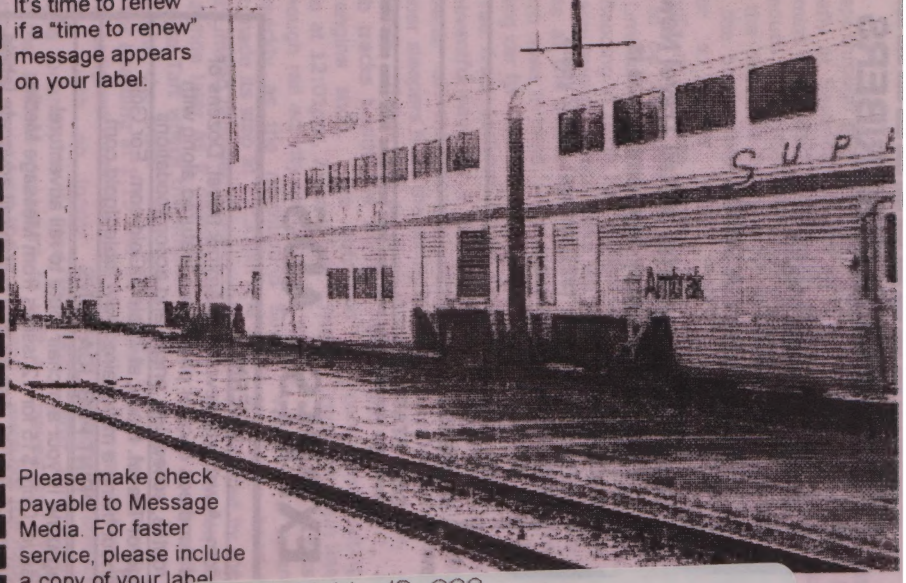

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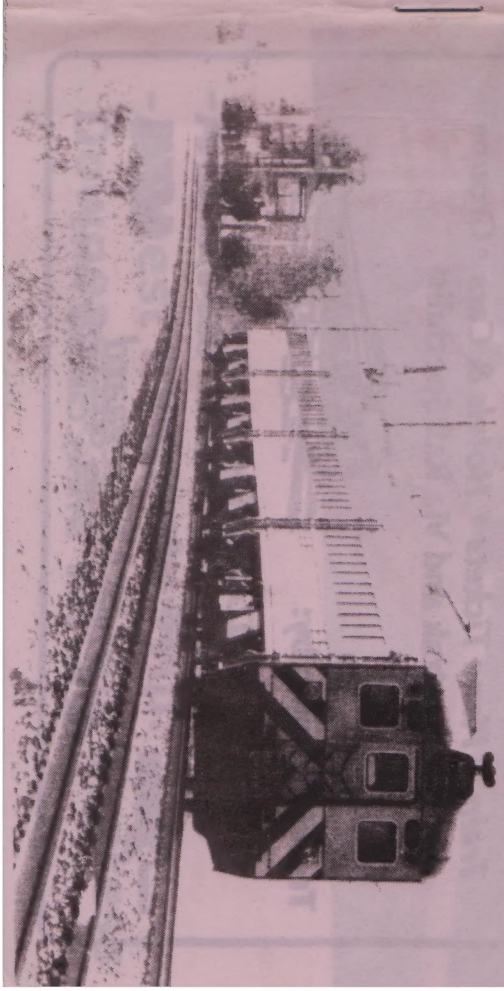

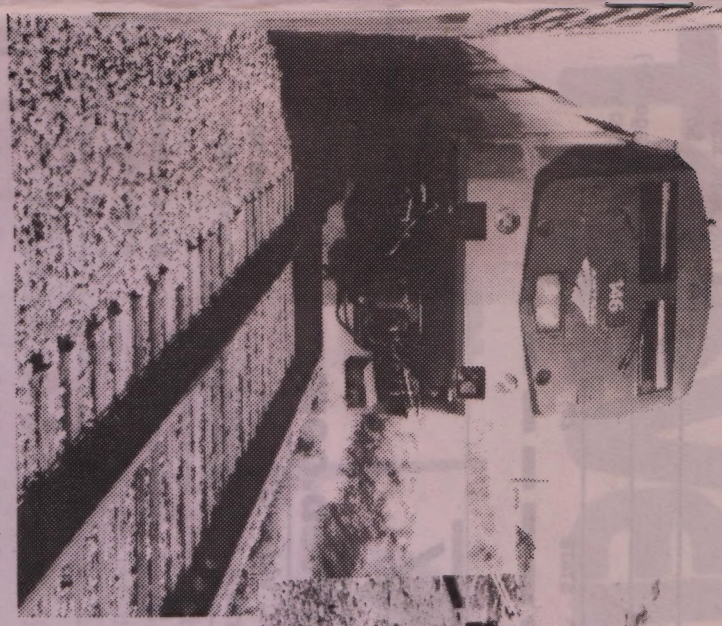

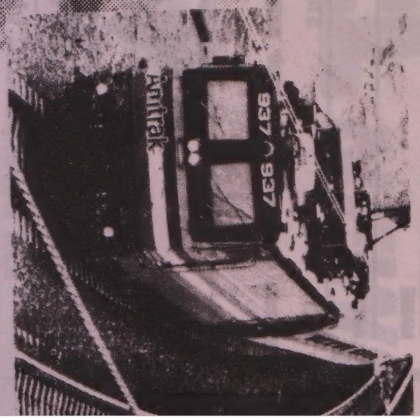

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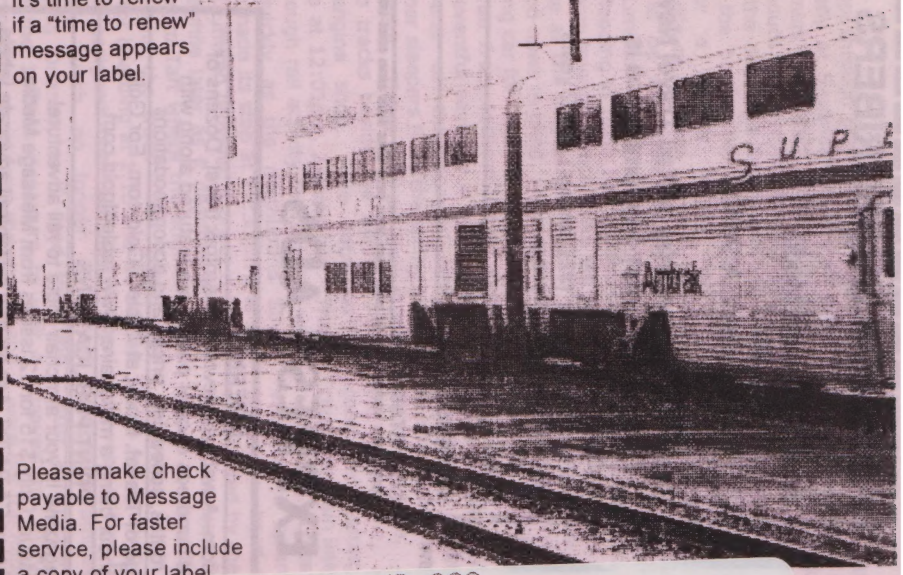

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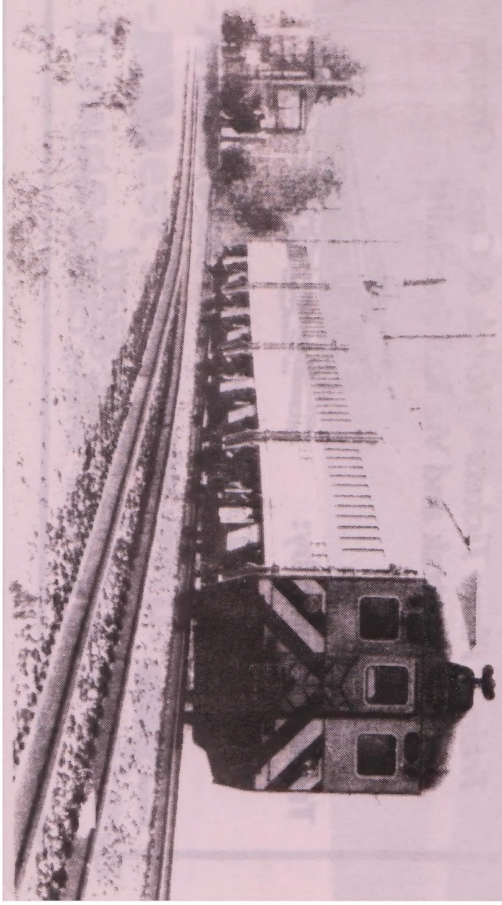

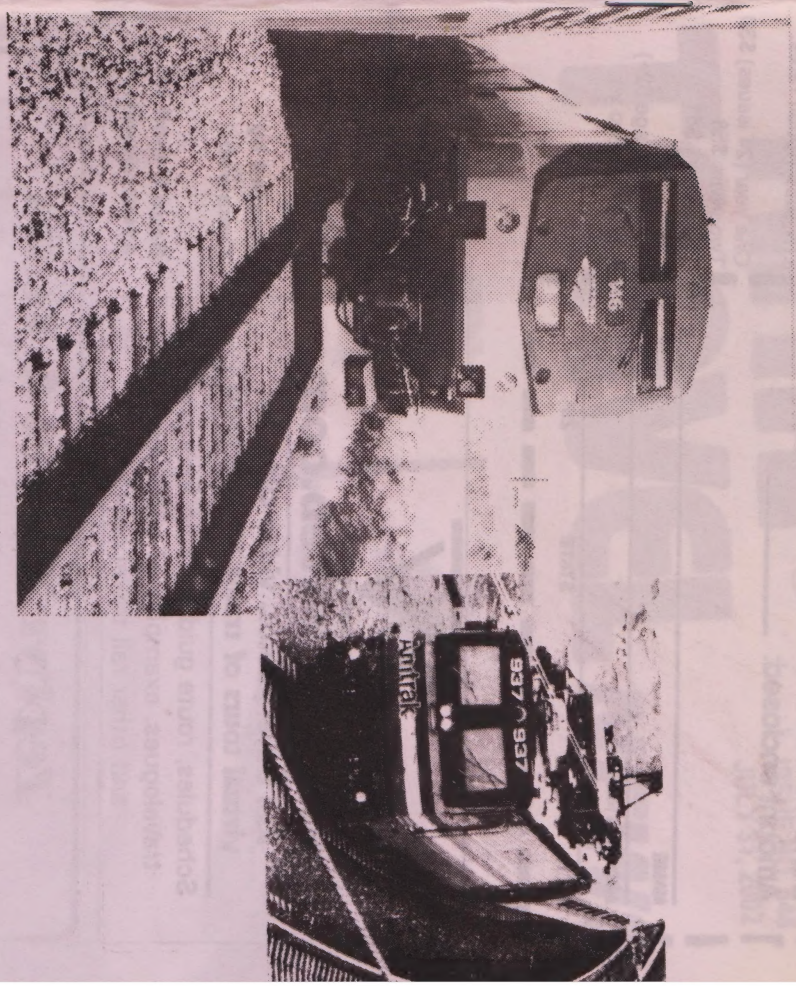

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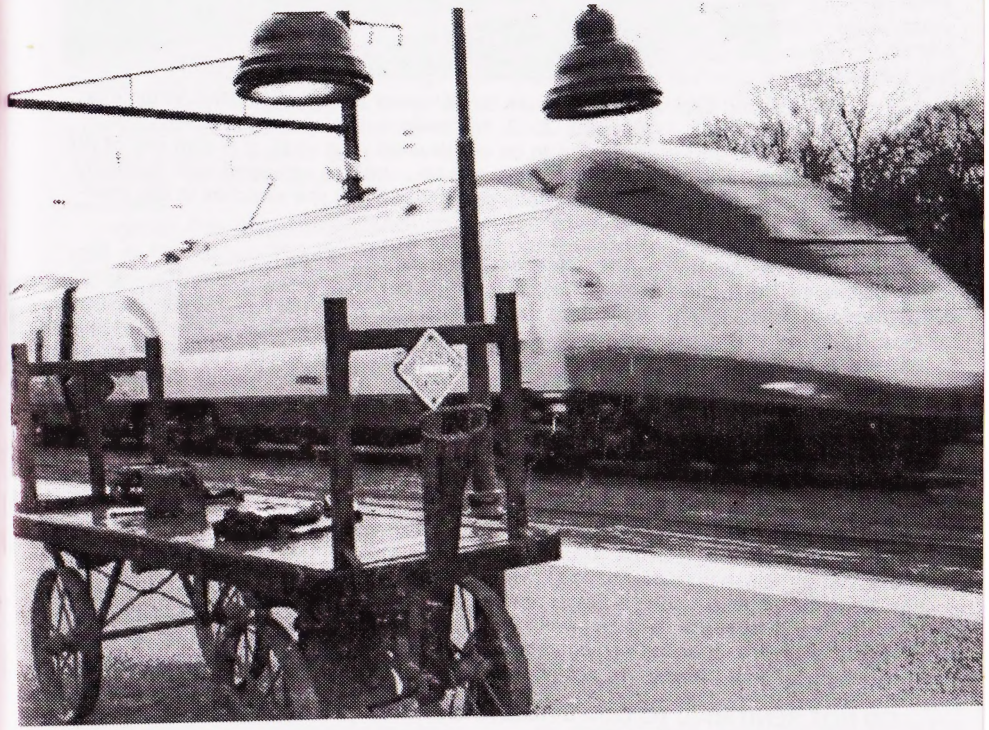

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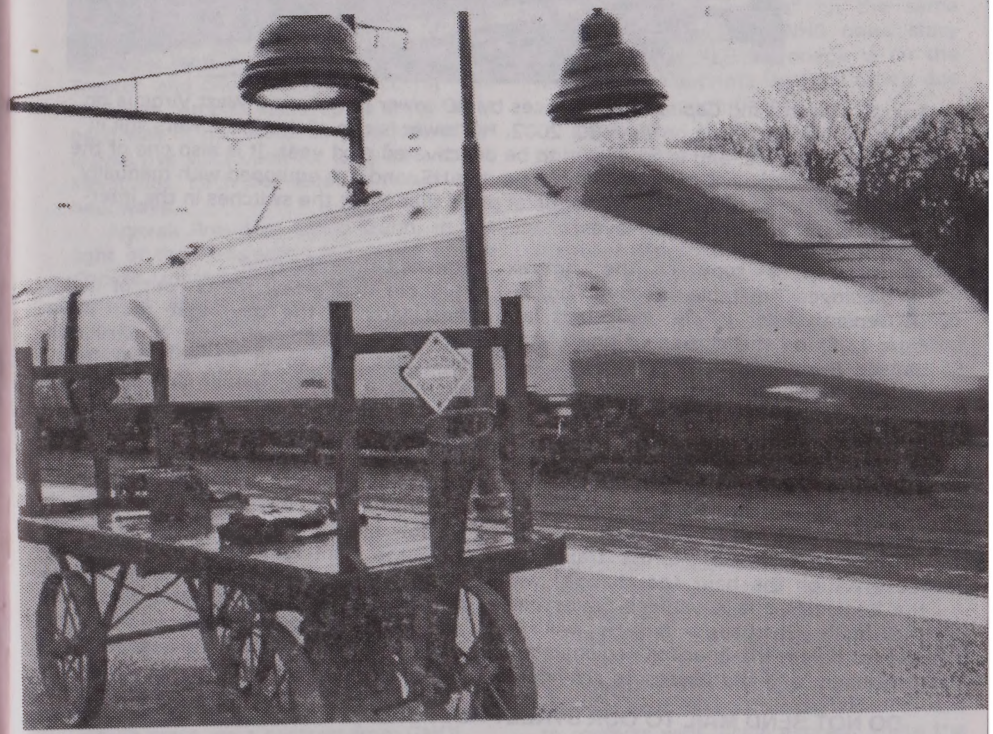

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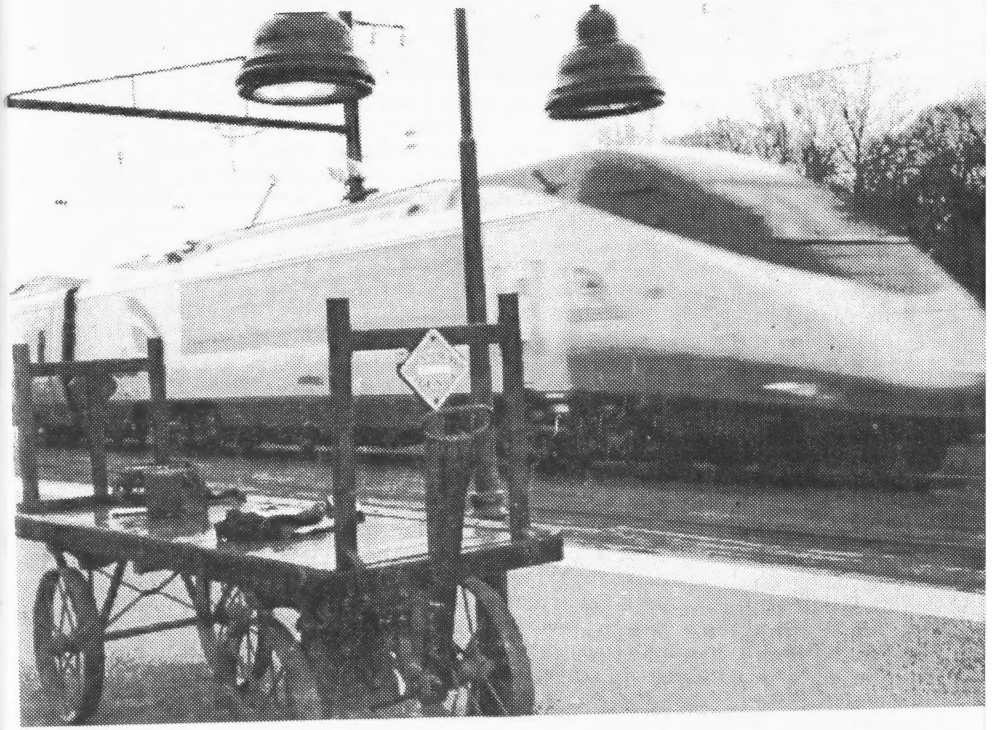

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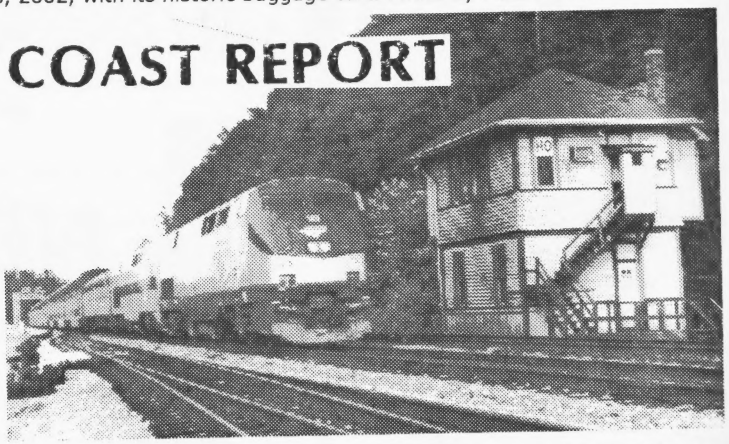

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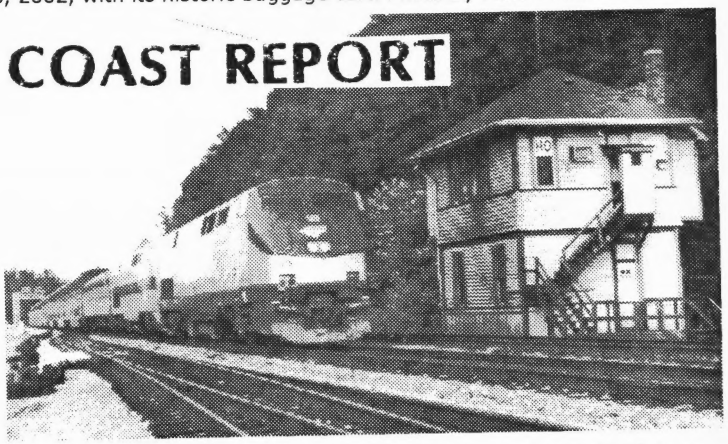

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Note that train 3693 is scheduled to arrive at 8:45pm. Train 3691 has a timetable arrival of 7:40pm, so the train number on the leaflet is incorrect.

It's been a while since I have recorded Amtrak train consists at New Haven. Most station dwell times are too short for me to get the whole consist, but I have observed train 190 (formerly train 12, the *Fast Mail*). The train arrives New Haven usually with three MHCs on the rear, which are dropped during the station stop. After 190 departs, train 490's equipment backs down and couples up. Normally the train consists of a Genny, coach, cab car (former Metroliner) and three MHCs. While waiting for my Metro-North train on Aug 6 I saw 490's equipment go through the station before 190 arrived, and the Genny was on the rear. What a sight 490 must have been this day with cab car, coach Genny and three MHCs!—Bob Underwood.

●●●

At Old Dominion University in Norfolk VA, the first operating maglev train in the US is scheduled to begin service Sep 30, running on a 3200-foot guideway at 40 mph, moving students across the campus. The Virginian-Pilot newspaper reported (Aug 9) that the train actually moves, although it's being run at a very slow speed for now, while various bugs are being worked out. According to the paper, those bugs are mostly minor things such as rattling doors, unrelated to the controversial propulsion system.

NY Governor Pataki reportedly has personally injected himself into negotiations with Amtrak to get the new Rensselaer train station open. Amtrak needs to sign a lease, and Amtrak President Gunn said that it might not be able to afford a lease. Whether Pataki might push to help Amtrak financially in the deal is not known, but at least he is throwing his influence into the matter.

●●●

New train station will be built near the former World Trade Center site in Manhattan, allowing connections between the NY subway and PATH trains to New Jersey. In an expected Aug 12 announcement, NY Gov. Pataki and other officials will say that the Administration has agreed to reallocate $4.5 billion of the $21 billion already agreed upon to help NY recover from the Sep 11, 2001 disaster. The money will go toward new construction of the station rather than just replacement of previous structures, which has been the rule with Federal Emergency Management Agency funds until now. Some of the $4.5 billion could also be used for other transportation projects, such as an MTA transit station on John Street. The Administration had already committed $1.8 billion to rebuild the destroyed subway and PATH stations at the World Trade Center. Construction of the new station will take several years.

Amtrak took delivery Aug 8 of the first of nine rebuilt Turboliners at Rensselaer NY. Amtrak will test the five-car train before formally accepting it. Delivery is more than two years behind schedule because of changed specifications and other problems. The trains were rebuilt by Super Steel Schenectady.

Nashville-Lebanon TN commuter rail line has a green light in the form of government agreement on costs and funding. Upgrading of Nashville & Eastern Railroad tracks, building of stations and obtaining equipment will total $3.76 million from local governments, with the feds paying about $30 million and the state $3.76 million. The line will have six stations: Nashville (downtown), Donelson, Chandler Road, Mount Juliet, Martha and Lebanon. Construction could begin a year from this fall. Farther in the future would be four other routes out of Nashville to Gallatin, Murfreesboro, Franklin & Kingston.

Ridership of Washington's Metro in July was the highest in its history.

About 7% of Metro's cars, mostly its oldest ones, have developed intense odors in their wool carpets and have generated passenger complaints. Metro is initiating a stepped-up program of cleaning and replacing the carpets. The removal of garbage cans from stations for safety reasons after Sep 11, 2001 is one of the factors that creates added garbage and other mess on the trains.

After the derailment of the *Capitol Limited* on July 29, CSX imposed speed limits because of continued hot weather. Besides affecting Amtrak, the limits also slowed MARC and Virginia Railway Express trains. They must run at freight train speeds between 1:00 and 9:00pm on days when the temperature has been 90 degrees or more on consecutive days.

19th Acela trainset was *not* accepted July 31 (correct my item on p.3). The web site that had reported it has removed it from their records. The 20th set (Set #4) has not been, as of Aug 9, reported as arrived in Philadelphia or Washington, even though it was reported as en route from Barre VT.

Amtrak President David Gunn is upset with the performance of the Acelas—with 18 sets in service, of which 15 are required weekdays, with three spares. He said that with all the modifications that Bombardier has made to them, no two trainsets are exactly alike. He was taking a short trip to BWI, Maryland and his train broke down at New Carrollton. The frequency of breakdowns of the computers, and brake problems, as well as rest room doors locking people in or out has made him consider possibly concentrating them on the NY-Boston end, where savings of one hour can be made, and bring back Metroliners NY-Washington until Bombardier gets their act together. A Bombardier technician is riding each train, which I can confirm, as there was one on each of my recent trips to Washington this summer attending the operas.

The *Vermonter* lost its checked baggage service effective Aug 7, so no bicycles or skis this year. I noted two 1800-series baggage cars in Chris Fussell's inventory of cars at Beech Grove, in RTN 647.

More about that list: It did not include any cars from the *Auto Train* accident in April. Sanford must still have them, and could actually be doing the rebuilds, as they have quite an extensive shop complex there. Also, in the F-40 list, two locomotives were listed twice—possibly a typo, as I think, based on my records, 341 is 241 and 351 is 315. Also, Heritage coach 7613 is listed twice. Most of the surviving 7000-series cars are back on the Clocker services Phila-NY. You have to add also the Kensington MD accident's cars to the "sick list".—Jim Langan.

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Boston MBTA's Silver Line opened July 20—a bus line that runs on Washington Street, between Dudley Square and Boylston Street. It was the first phase of a 3-phase project that would connect with Logan Airport. The Silver Line was supposed to replace the elevated Orange Line, but many vocal critics are calling for light rail service instead of buses.

Said Association for Public Transportation Board Member Barry Steinberg, "It was originally proposed to make what is going to be the Silver Line a streetcar line feeding into the Green Line subway via an existing unused tunnel. Instead, the Silver Line bus would not fit into the existing tunnel. A new tunnel would have to be constructed, and parallel the Green Line and then the Red Line past South Station. A streetcar line, even if it follows the proposed routing in South Boston, could require less in the way of clearance expense. If it was done as a feeder to the Green Line, there would be much more flexibility in terms of destinations and routings, depending on the actual travel demand—this as opposed to connecting disparate constituencies that would be forced to change modes of public transportation travel to get where they are going."

Metro-North reported that as of Jun 30 its on-time perf for the year was 98.1%. Ridership was down 0.9% from last year.

Metro-North dug up an old, 1000-gallon fuel oil tank at its Tarrytown station in late July, part of an effort to eliminate underground tanks that might leak and replace them with above-ground tanks. New tanks will have double walls. Although the old ones haven't leaked yet, M-N wants to get at them before they do. So far, other tanks removed were at Goldens Bridge, Crestwood, 125th Street, Fleetwood and Grand Central Terminal.

Boston's "Big Dig" or Central Artery highway project has a cost overrun so far of 300%, much higher percentagewise than any other public transportation project in a study done in Denmark. Danish researcher Bent Flyvbjerg told the Boston Globe that "The Big Dig, to put it simply, is Third World project, in the sense that you can only find comparable cost overruns in the Third World."

MBTA Red Line riders have been subjected to slow orders since Feb, but as of late July they have been promised that normal speeds will gradually return between Alewife and Charles. The original problem was a rear-car derailment that may have damaged about 2400 feet of track, inbound beyond Davis Square. It has taken some months to fix the track and to assess whether it needed major repairs.

The four subway lines, 1, 2, 3 and 9 trains, that served lower Manhattan before Sep 11, 2001, will go back into service in September, about a year after they were disabled by the terrorist attack. The reopening will come two months early because of rapid progress on restoration. A half-mile of new track was laid, besides other work.

MIDWEST REPORT

Chicago Transit Authority may raise fares next year to cover a deficit caused by the economy: fewer riders, less sales tax revenue. The CTA has not raised fares in over 10 years, and prefers not to, as ridership drops each time fares go up.

The Daily Herald, a suburban Chicago paper, editorialized Aug 15 that Amtrak must fix the idled Acelas as fast as possible because "The Midwest has its own promising plans for a high-speed network that would link Chicago to several major cities, including St. Louis, Detroit, Minneapolis" and that everyone is watching the East Coast experiment to see how well high-speed trains work in this country.

Denver Union Station is currently configured as a stub-end station, but planners want it to be a "through station" in plans now being considered. Planning is at a furious pace as design consultants move toward an Apr 2003 deadline to complete an environmental report, preliminary engineering and proposed rezoning of the DUS site for commercial development. There are 12 alternative designs for track and bus lane layouts. They all include light rail, regional and intercity bus and passenger rail (Amtrak, Ski Train, local commuter rail—Denver-Boulder and Denver-DIA—Front Range high-speed commuter rail and any future fixed guideway (monorail, guided bus, etc.). All designs have six passenger rail tracks—three of the for light rail. See also on the Web, www.denverunionstation.org.--Jon Esty.

On the same day that the Akron (OH) Beacon Journal ran a political cartoon picturing two "feds" tossing sacks of money into a bin labeled "Deposit tax money here" on the front of an Amtrak engine while one of them commented "I miss cow catchers", the paper ran an article headlined "Airport receives federal grant." The article began "The Akron-Canton Regional Airport and Air Tran Airways have received a $950,000 federal grant to begin new service from the airport within the next six months. Neither the airport nor the airline would say Thursday where the new route would be going." (Jun 28)

RAIL CANADA

VIA Rail has announced that they will start a new overnight train from Toronto to Ottawa beginning Oct 27, using their new Renaissance cars. They will also have a new station at Barrhaven, a western suburb of Ottawa. The new train could possibly run together with the current *Enterprise* from Toronto to Montreal and then split off at Brockville. On my recent trip we had a deadhead set of HEP II coaches with their own F-40 engine up front; they were to become Corridor train 44 the following morning out of Ottawa to Toronto. The *Enterprise* lays over at Brockville before continuing on to Montreal for its 8:15 arrival. The new train will arrive at Ottawa at 6:15am, after leaving Toronto at about 11:30pm. The other direction, it leaves after midnight from Ottawa and reaches Toronto about 8am.

The train will run daily except Saturday and will connect in both directions with the transcontinental *Canadian* train. The trains are to consist of two coaches, three sleepers and a lounge car. Continental breakfast will be served, but not dinner. The trains will have a long dwell time in Kingston to assure that they do not reach their destinations too early in the morning. Overnight service on the route was dropped in 1990. (Jim Langan contributed to this report.)

Canadian Transport Ministry (Transport Canada) is studying a program to improve the country's rail infrastructure, spending $1.25-$1.88 billion over a period of 4-8 years. The idea is to help the environment by encouraging more movement of freight by rail rather than by high-way. VIA's passenger service would benefit when money was spent on freight lines it uses.

WEST COAST REPORT

A scene on the Sacramento Light Rail, May 20. Photo from John Harmon's trip report, which begins on page 8.

Rehab of the Vancouver WA station should begin in a few months, reports WashARP. Last year Amtrak renovated the platforms.

The *Cascades* trains are being delayed 15-20mins per run by increased Customs inspections at the border at Blaine WA. The trains' on-time perf in the first quarter of this year was less than 75%, while the goal is 80% or higher. Ridership was up in May by 10% but down in June 3%. The threat of an Amtrak shutdown earlier this summer seems to have affected ridership.

Los Angeles' Gold Line light rail line between East Pasadena and East L.A. was to have test trains begin running the weekend of Aug 17-18. Next year the section from East Pasadena will open, and the East L.A. end should see construction begin next year and open by 2008.

Former Santa Fe station in Berkeley CA is to become part of a new Montessori school campus. It's now a restaurant.

Caltrans said that highway commute gridlock has dropped 12% in the Bay Area in 2001. It seems to be a result both of the declining economy and of transit/highway improvements. But East Bay drivers see no change in clogged roads.

Caltrain run 66 hit a van betweer San Martin and Gilroy the evening of Aug 16. The van made a right turn onto the tracks at a private crossing without stopping at the sign. The train hit the front of the van, spinning it around. Luckily, the van driver escaped with injuries; he would have been killed if the train had struck further back on his vehicle. The same train had had a near miss in a similar situation just a few minutes earlier. A student engineer was at the controls, and it was his first such terrifying incident.

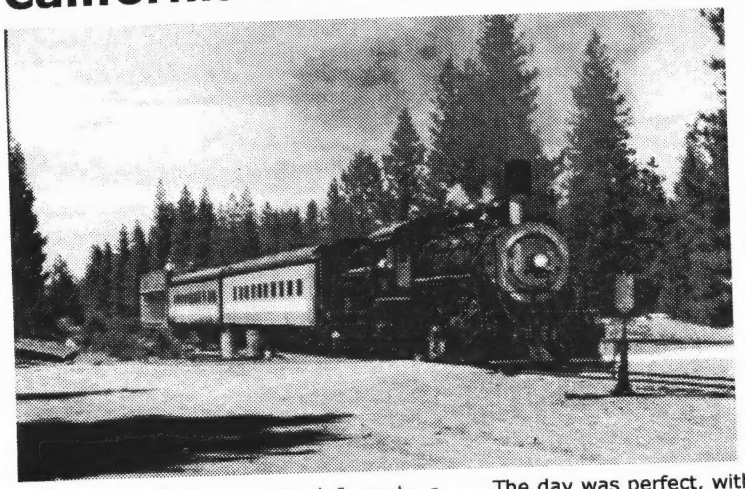
San Francisco airport AirTrain people mover had a little accident in testing on Aug 4, totaling one $1.3 million car. A software failure was blamed for a collision between two of the driverless trains. Two other cars were damaged. The system, which was supposed to be operational in Sep, will now have indefinite delays.

The *San Joaquins'* sit-down dining service will be marketed more intensely in the upcoming months, as suggested by an item here last issue. Some officials have expressed concern over the under-utilized service, which is almost unique for short- and medium-distance Amtrak trains. (One reason for under-utilization could be the lack-of-food problem that John Harmon reports on page 9.)

Las Vegas service: A decision on the inauguration of the L.A.-L.V. service is expected before mid-Sept. The service may not use Talgo equipment at first, but *Pacific Surfliner* cars because of slowness of obtaining FRA approval. If Talgo cars are used, an expensive specialized maintenance facility in L.A. would have to be built. The environmental review is complete, so Amtrak is expected to be allowed to build 20 miles of new track through the Mojave National Preserve soon. All these plans are subject to the conditions of Amtrak's recent $100 million loan and whether exceptions to the prohibition against service expansion through the 2003 fiscal year can be made.

BART plans a fare level to the S.F. airport of under $7, much cheaper than alternative modes of transportation.

California Blitz By John J. Harmon: Photos by the author



The PLA Special executes a runpast at the junction with BNSF's "Inside Gateway" route at Lookout CA on May 19.

On a mid-May weekend I made a quick trip to California, primarily for the purpose of riding a steam excursion on the McCloud River Railroad from McCloud to Lookout, sponsored by the Pacific Locomotive Association. I needed to flesh out the trip with other rail activities, and decided to try to work in the Yolo Shore Line, Sacramento Light Rail, the ex-SP "Fresno Line" south from Sacramento, and several BART lines I had never before ridden. The entire trip would take just four days, from Friday through Monday.

As has been the case since Sep 11, United's flights from Newark via Denver were on-time or early. The hype about standing in line for two hours seems just that, as we've rarely experienced a wait of more than 10 minutes (although I admit that I don't normally fly during the busiest part of the day).

The drive from Sacramento to Mount Shasta took less than three hours, with minimal traffic—somewhat surprising for a Friday afternoon. Views of Mt. Shasta in the late afternoon sun, and a viewing area, permitted a brief stop for photos.

Saturday dawned clear and cool, and the drive over the mountain to McCloud took about 20 minutes. We made the mistake of going to the yard first, where the NRHS Convention trip had boarded a few years ago. No one was there, but we easily found the depot, where the dinner train is headquartered.

The day was perfect, with temperatures just warm enough to permit riding the upper level of the homemade open-air car for most of the day. The group was small, perhaps no more than 70 passengers, and that made for plenty of space to stretch out in the two ex-VIA coaches. Power was engine #18, built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1914 for the McCloud River. The 2-8-2 was entirely appropriate for our little three-car train, but nonetheless had to work hard up some of the grades.

There were four water stops, with a contractor in a tank truck furnishing the required ingredients, and there were several runpasts. The train was turned on the balloon track at Lookout. It became quite chilly about half-way back to McCloud, and most passengers retreated to the coaches.

We were back in McCloud around 8pm, about 90 minutes late, but I doubt if anyone cared, as it was a wonderful day.

I awoke Sunday to a pouring rain, and had a good breakfast in the hotel (which turned out to be good planning) before hitting I-5 for the trek to Woodland, where I hoped to ride the Yolo Shore Line. I had timed the trip on the way up on Friday, and thought I had left plenty of time, but didn't count on the downpour, which kept my speed 10-15mph below normal.

I arrived in Woodland with about 5 minutes to spare, but there were no signs anywhere directing me to the YSL. So I had to give that up, and decided to fall back to my second option, which was to ride the Sacramento Light Rail.

San Joaquin 704 with engine 462 pauses at Modesto CA on the way from Sacramento to Bakersfield on May 20.

This turns out to be not a very user-friendly system. I wanted a day pass, which was available for $3.50, according to the sign, or $1.75 for senior or disabled. I was tempted to go for the senior fare, but didn't know if this was one of those systems that makes you get an authorization card first, so I decided to play it safe. Now to the unfriendly part.

To get the needed token to put into a machine that will print you a ticket, you have to feed dollar bills (no fives, tens or twenties) into a machine that eventually is supposed to produce the desired token. The first one I tried wouldn't accept *any* bills, and I was intimidated by notices that warned intending riders that non-working change machines were no excuse for lack of a valid ticket.

So I walked several blocks to the next station, where I found a working change machine, and boarded the next train that came along. Upon looking at what I thought was a day ticket, I noticed that it had an expiration time exactly 90 minutes after I bought it. Nothing on the ticket said anything about its being good all day.

Oh well, I'd see how far I could get. So I rode all the way out to Butterfield, then turned around and rode out to Watt-I-80. My time was running out, and I didn't have enough dollar bills left to buy even a senior ticket, so I decided to tough it out. I got back downtown without seeing the dreaded ticket inspector. By now it was starting to rain hard again, so I walked over to the Amtrak station, cutting through a shopping center on the way in order to keep dry.

I thought I would get some lunch at the depot, but all they had were some vending machines with snacks, so I settled for an ice cream bar. I had time to walk into Old Sacramento for something, but since it was raining pretty hard, I stayed where I was.

The object of riding Amtrak was to add 51 miles of ex-SP line to my mileage chart. Amtrak recently added a later afternoon departure from Sacramento to Bakersfield, and I could ride this train to Modesto, turn around there and ride the last northbound *San Joaquin* to Emeryville, where I would spend the night.

We left on time at 4:25pm with a four-car train, and surprisingly (to me) we backed to the junction at Elvas, where we then proceeded at a good pace down the SP's "Fresno Line". Along the way I went into the "diner" (actually a café car) for a light snack, having plans to have something more substantial on the train to Emeryville.

We lost a few minutes at Stockton (the rain moved out, leaving a spectacular double rainbow) waiting for a late northbound, but made good time to Modesto, where I detrained.

The station at Modesto is modern, with ample parking, but far from any center of commercial activity. I could have followed the example of the agent, who had pizza delivered before she closed down her window for her half-hour break, but I had better things in mind.

The northbound train was due at 7:27 pm, but the agent announced that the train was running about 20 minutes late. The standard rule is that late trains get later, and today was no exception. We finally got out of town 40 minutes down, this time with a five-car train.

I headed for the diner, looking for something hot and substantial to eat. The attendant was sitting in the back, looking somewhat glum. Upon my query, he explained that he was out of everything. No hot food, no sandwiches, no snacks, no booze, no soft drinks. Only coffee.

Now the train was comfortably full, with no signs of overcrowding, and it was running a bit late, but not enough to

account for a swarm of locusts descending on the dining car.

I restrained myself from questioning the attendant, who doubtless had already had his fill of hungry and thirsty Guests. It wasn't his fault, and additional questioning on my part would be "piling on".

But I wanted to ask if the diner was restocked at Bakersfield, if running out of food was a regular occurrence, and if Amtrak management had any idea how many people rode the train, and how many wanted food and drink. The State of California spent good money to provide dining cars for this service. What good are they if they run empty with 2½ hours remaining in the journey?

So dinner became a bowl of chili at a restaurant next to the Sheraton in Emeryville, where I was staying.

Monday morning saw me up early, with a nice breakfast in the Sheraton, and out to the street for the free shuttle over to the BART station at MacArthur (can't get any more user-friendly than that!). A friend had previously sent me a senior pass on BART, as these apparently are not available everywhere.

I had previously ridden the line to Richmond, but still needed the lines to Pittsburg, Fremont and Dublin. I had constructed a schedule from the BART Web site, and it worked perfectly, even though a couple of trains were a few minutes late getting to their terminals.

I ended up at Colma, where I took the bus over to SFO for my flight back to Newark. Again, security and check-in took less than 10 minutes, with the only disappointment that my upgrade request was not granted. But I ended up in a window seat with the middle seat empty, so that was fine.

Northern Exposure: An Amtrak Guest Rewards Trip By Jack Turner: Photos by the author

Our transcontinental rail trip back in Feb, coupled with copious hotel partner points, put us over the top for a free one-way, one-region trip courtesy of the Amtrak Guest Rewards program. We arranged it to include the *Downeaster*, which he hadn't ridden yet.

We started our summer 2002 trip with a family visit to North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains and included a return visit to Tweetsie Railroad in Blowing Rock, NC. Tweestie Railroad features a scenic 3 ½-mile steam train ride behind either engine number 12 or number 190. On this date the 190 drew the assignment and we enjoyed the outing behind this native of the White Pass & Yukon route. During my childhood visits to Tweetsie, the 190 was dubbed "The Yukon Queen", a name that fondly lingers in my memory bank.

Over the years this theme park has expanded to include various rides, stage shows, and a barnyard petting farm.

After our mountain respite, we headed to Atlanta where son John and I would board the northbound Crescent on July 5. After depositing our luggage at Amtrak's small station, we accompanied my wife through the downtown traffic en route to her sister's house; then John and I boarded a MARTA rapid transit train at the College Park station. As we bade farewell to my wife, a horn from a passing CSX freight train signaled a good omen to the start of our northern journey.

The College Park MARTA station is located in the center of that village and is just a couple hundred yards from the flight path of planes landing at busy Atlanta Hartsfield Airport.

We rode MARTA to its northeastern terminus, Doraville, then stayed aboard for the southbound return. We detrained at the Arts Center stop near downtown and boarded a waiting city bus (route 23) that would carry us a few blocks north to the Amtrak station. In pre-Amtrak days, this station was known as Peachtree Station, designed to serve the city's northern suburbs. Most Southern Railway passenger trains then made a dogleg move to the cavernous Terminal Station that once sat near the site of today's CNN headquarters and the Georgia Dome. Because it was a secondary station, Peachtree was very compact, built right beside Peachtree Street and elevated above Southern's dual-track mainline. A few years ago the station was expanded slightly, which was fortunate on this night as a crowd of 183 passengers would board train # 20. This included a church youth group which would fill two Amfleet II coaches that were to be added to the rear of the train ahead of two baggage-mail cars.

The Crescent ambled in at 8:22pm, the rear cars were added, and the youth group was escorted down the long stairway to the platform. Soon we made our way downstairs via an elevator and boarded sleeper "Cape View" for the overnight trip to Washington, DC. By the time the train departed Atlanta at 9:06pm (just over an hour late) we were seated in the dining car for a delicious pork chop dinner accompanied by green beans and rice, and topped off with a slice of apple pie.

As we finished our meal, the dining car steward took to the intercom and implored passengers to partake of late night chicken dinners in the diner for the value price of $7. This was a pleasant departure from the standard "Let's get it over with" attitude often encountered on other routes.

After passing through Clemson and Greenville, SC, I was almost asleep when the unmistakable sound of an emergency brake application grabbed my attention. My scanner was quickly turned on and the engineer's call to the Norfolk Southern dispatcher stated "uninitiated emergency application". This was good news as my immediate thought harkened back to February when our Texas Eagle was delayed by a grade crossing collision. Soon the conductor radioed that we had a busted backup hose on the rear mail car and within 6 minutes we were underway. A good night's sleep ensued as we made our way along the Piedmont region of North Carolina and into the foothills of southern Virginia.

Morning found us running about 90 minutes late at Lynchburg which dampened prospects of making our connection to Acela Express train # 2252, as we had an 80 minute connection and would have to travel upstairs at Washington Union Station to reach that train. We resigned ourselves to taking the next express two hours later and decided to enjoy our trek through the region popularized by television's The Waltons.

A hearty down South style breakfast was enjoyed as we traveled along lush green hills and passed the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. By Alexandria we had made up a considerable amount of time and it was apparent that we had a chance to make train # 2252. As soon as we arrived in Washington at 10:35am our outstanding sleeper attendant Romadell Lambert detrained us before setting off luggage, which allowed us to make our connection with a few minutes to spare.

We hustled up the escalator with our luggage and made our way to track 18 where the sleek Acela Express awaited. Soon after we settled into one of the business class cars train # 2252 departed at 11am and shortly showed off its quick acceleration capability. By the time we reached the Susquehanna River near Havre de Grace, MD the Acela was traveling close to its 135 mph speed limit for the segment south of New York.

Philadelphia was reached in just over 95 minutes and the ride was extremely smooth yet one couldn't help feeling this train was like a race horse being held back from running at a full gallop. Indeed, track conditions do not permit the pricey Acela Express from coming close to its potential as the train displayed bursts of speed followed by stretches of more routine speed.

Lunch was secured from the cafe-bistro car and proved to be a step up from typical cafe car fare but more expensive and a bit short of the sit-down meals available on the west's Talgo trains or the German ICE Train which operated in the Northeast several years ago. Despite this fact, the large windows, comfortable seats, and adequate legroom made the Acela Express far superior to the Amfleet equipment used in Acela Regional service. Also welcomed were the quick stops at most stations which averaged approximately 90 seconds each as this train does not linger any longer than necessary.

Our longest stop, New York City, consumed but 13 minutes during which the operating crew changed and a large turnover of the sparse Saturday passenger manifest took place. We were joined there by RTN correspondent Adron Hall and fellow railfans Jack Grill and Rodney Pearson who had flown north from Mississippi for a weekend of Northern railfanning.

Beyond New York, Acela Express was truly hampered by track conditions as countless slow orders on Metro-North tracks affected conventional and express trains alike. The pace quickened beyond New Haven as we sailed along the beautiful Connecticut shoreline, following

The *Downeaster* pauses in Portland ME between runs. P40 locomotives pull these trains northbound and they are led southbound by a converted F40 "cabbage" car. Photo by John C. Turner

scenic harbors, inlets, and beaches. South of Providence we clocked the mileposts and determined our speed to be 144 mph, though once again the speed seemed to come in bursts. Equally impressive was the tilt mechanism that comfortably leaned the cars into curves. The tilt mechanism could be heard at times sounding much like an airplane extending its flaps, a sound I have not heard for several years due to my disdain for that mode of travel.

Boston South Station was reached at 5:47pm and John and I quickly hailed a cab for the short hop to Le Meridien Hotel, a beautiful European-style luxury hotel housed in a converted Federal Reserve bank.

Sunday, July 7 found John and me making the short trek to South Station for 8:15am MBTA train # 2051 to Plymouth. This line, once operated as the Old Colony Line, lay dormant for years before being resuscitated by the MBTA a few years ago. The 50 minute ride to Plymouth took us alongside the subway red line for a few miles then veered off through residential areas followed by heavily wooded and, eventually, marshy regions.

We reached the end of the line at 9:10am and, as expected, found the station platform to be in an industrial area away from the center of historic Plymouth. Having been to Plymouth Rock and other local attractions a couple years earlier, we opted to take the return trip to Boston, which departed at 10:05am, rather than take a shuttle bus or taxi into town. A couple minutes after 11:00am we were back at South Station, ready for some sightseeing in historic Boston. It should be noted that planning is required to make a round trip to Plymouth, as many trains serving that line branch off south of Halifax and terminate at Kingston rather than Plymouth.

Our sightseeing tour was an excellent two-hour tour aboard an Old Town Trolley Tour replica trolley bus. The tour took us past numerous famous sights such as Bunker Hill, Old North Church, the Boston Commons, Quincy Market, and the Boston Tea Party site to name a few. Our trolley driver/guide "Red" was a hyper Bostonian whose historic knowledge was imparted with interesting vignettes that made the tour pass quickly and enjoyably. We were glad that we had scheduled time for this on a Sunday to avoid the legendary terrible Boston weekday traffic. After some relaxation time at our hotel, we walked five blocks to Quincy Market for an excellent dinner at The Old Union Oyster House, a local landmark--the nation's oldest continually operated restaurant.

On Monday, July 8 we met up with Adron, Jack, and Rodney for a day of commuter train riding. As we would be departing from North Station, John and I walked to South Station then rode the red line subway to the Park Avenue station, where we transferred to the green line, which carried us to North Station.

Boston's North Station is incorporated into the Fleet Center, home of the NBA Boston Celtics and NHL Boston Bruins, and is adjacent to the site of the old Boston Garden. Compared to South Station, this rail terminal is sterile with no ornate exterior and only McDonalds and Dunkin Donuts shops as opposed to the large food court at the southside terminal. Despite this, we found the facility clean and quite appropriate for commuter train service and Amtrak's Downeaster.

Our first journey of the day took us northwestward on MBTA train # 417, a reverse commute run to Fitchburg. The five-car consist pulled by a GP40MC departed on time at 8:55am, quickly crossed the Mystic River drawbridge toward its first stop, Porter Square in Cambridge, home of Harvard University. Though the famous Ivy League school was not visible from the train, we got a clear look at Brandeis University 15 minutes later at the Brandeis-Roberts stop. Our conductor, Joe, waved his hat to give the highball signal to our engineer in a manner harking back to a bygone era. His conductor hat bore a badge labeled "Amtrak Conductor" which reminded us that the long distance carrier contracts for MBTA train crews. These commuter contracts may well have helped stave off Amtrak's elimination a few days earlier.

We were fortunate to ride with Joe as he was enthusiastic about his work, provided details of highlights of the route, and revealed that he was a second generation railroader. When we noted a scenic pond just beyond Lincoln Town Center, Joe noted "That's Walden Pond" which restored my confidence in Thoreau's idyllic description, as years earlier I had been unimpressed by its more commercialized highway side.

A couple minutes later our train paused in the charming town center of Concord, best known as the destination of Paul Revere's midnight ride and the closest town to the Old North Bridge where the first shot of the Revolutionary War was fired.

After our stops at South Acton and Littleton, the Berkshire Mountains came clearly into view to the southwest as the route began to alternate between rural scenes and views of pleasant communities. At Ayer, we passed an old brick interlocking tower located at the junction with a CSX line and noted that we were now one hour out of Boston. A westbound Guilford freight waited for our passage en route to our next stop, the quaint town of Shirley. A sign affixed to the station shelter advised patrons "Buy tickets at Shirley General Store", which appeared to be right across the street.

Shortly we were back up to 55 mph (earlier the speed limit was 65) as we ran through the center of a rail yard near North Leominster and passed an-out-of service turntable. We reached Fitchburg at 10:14am and used the 14 minute turn to photograph the train and check out the modern intermodal station, which contained a snack stand, restrooms, and waiting area.

Returning to Boston as train # 418, now running in push mode, we picked up business as the inbound run was an all-stops train making 12 intermediate stops while skipping one or two flag stops. Despite the added stops, the return trip consumed only 10 more minutes than the 9-stop westbound run. We arrived back at North Station at 11:53am, enough time to grab a burger and board the 12:15 to Rockport.

The Rockport line branches away from the Fitchburg line just beyond the throat of the station and the adjacent drawbridge. After crossing the marshlands surrounding the Pine and Saugus rivers, the Rockport line passes through the historic town of Salem, home of the infamous witch trials, and traces a path along several scenic inlets and harbors filled with expensive boats. The names of towns along this line, such as Swampscott, Beverly Farms, Prides Crossing, Manchester, and Gloucester, evoke an English heritage. Gloucester is a beautiful fishing village known for its famous fisherman's statue and was featured in the movie "The Perfect Storm". This town and Rockport are located on Massachusetts' "other cape", Cape Ann, a gorgeous area well worth visiting. The platform at Rockport literally is at the end of the line and our train # 117 tied up at 1:26pm. A deli and a Dunkin Donuts shop are adjacent to the Rockport station which allows a convenient midday turn.

The return run aboard train # 124 departed Rockport at 2pm with the same 5-car consist as we had on the outbound trip, this time in push mode. We took up residence in the rear coach, just ahead of the GP40, and enjoyed the commuter train equivalent of a private car as all boarding passengers decided to sit 1 or 2 cars ahead. We were back at North Station at 3:12pm, boarded the green line subway, transferred to the red line and rode to its end point in Ashmont.

Then the fun really began as we transferred to a connecting 1940s vintage PCC car that operated on steel rails under trolley wires for a ride of approximately 15 minutes to Mattapan. This is the last remaining PCC line in Boston and it was like a step back in time to ride the classic coach. At least a half dozen PCC cars were operating this day, some decked out in green paint, the others in orange livery. We stepped off for a few minutes

The *Downeaster* pauses in Portland ME between runs. P40 locomotives pull these trains northbound and they are led southbound by a converted F40 "cabbage" car. Photo by John C. Turner

scenic harbors, inlets, and beaches. South of Providence we clocked the mileposts and determined our speed to be 144 mph, though once again the speed seemed to come in bursts. Equally impressive was the tilt mechanism that comfortably leaned the cars into curves. The tilt mechanism could be heard at times sounding much like an airplane extending its flaps, a sound I have not heard for several years due to my disdain for that mode of travel.

Boston South Station was reached at 5:47pm and John and I quickly hailed a cab for the short hop to Le Meridien Hotel, a beautiful European-style luxury hotel housed in a converted Federal Reserve bank.

Sunday, July 7 found John and me making the short trek to South Station for 8:15am MBTA train # 2051 to Plymouth. This line, once operated as the Old Colony Line, lay dormant for years before being resuscitated by the MBTA a few years ago. The 50 minute ride to Plymouth took us alongside the subway red line for a few miles then veered off through residential areas followed by heavily wooded and, eventually, marshy regions.

We reached the end of the line at 9:10am and, as expected, found the station platform to be in an industrial area away from the center of historic Plymouth. Having been to Plymouth Rock and other local attractions a couple years earlier, we opted to take the return trip to Boston, which departed at 10:05am, rather than take a shuttle bus or taxi into town. A couple minutes after 11:00am we were back at South Station, ready for some sightseeing in historic Boston. It should be noted that planning is required to make a round trip to Plymouth, as many trains serving that line branch off south of Halifax and terminate at Kingston rather than Plymouth.

Our sightseeing tour was an excellent two-hour tour aboard an Old Town Trolley Tour replica trolley bus. The tour took us past numerous famous sights such as Bunker Hill, Old North Church, the Boston Commons, Quincy Market, and the Boston Tea Party site to name a few. Our trolley driver/guide "Red" was a hyper Bostonian whose historic knowledge was imparted with interesting vignettes that made the tour pass quickly and enjoyably. We were glad that we had scheduled time for this on a Sunday to avoid the legendary terrible Boston weekday traffic. After some relaxation time at our hotel, we walked five blocks to Quincy Market for an excellent dinner at The Old Union Oyster House, a local landmark--the nation's oldest continually operated restaurant.

On Monday, July 8 we met up with Adron, Jack, and Rodney for a day of commuter train riding. As we would be departing from North Station, John and I walked to South Station then rode the red line subway to the Park Avenue station, where we transferred to the green line, which carried us to North Station.

Boston's North Station is incorporated into the Fleet Center, home of the NBA Boston Celtics and NHL Boston Bruins, and is adjacent to the site of the old Boston Garden. Compared to South Station, this rail terminal is sterile with no ornate exterior and only McDonalds and Dunkin Donuts shops as opposed to the large food court at the southside terminal. Despite this, we found the facility clean and quite appropriate for commuter train service and Amtrak's Downeaster.

Our first journey of the day took us northwestward on MBTA train # 417, a reverse commute run to Fitchburg. The five-car consist pulled by a GP40MC departed on time at 8:55am, quickly crossed the Mystic River drawbridge toward its first stop, Porter Square in Cambridge, home of Harvard University. Though the famous Ivy League school was not visible from the train, we got a clear look at Brandeis University 15 minutes later at the Brandeis-Roberts stop. Our conductor, Joe, waved his hat to give the highball signal to our engineer in a manner harking back to a bygone era. His conductor hat bore a badge labeled "Amtrak Conductor" which reminded us that the long distance carrier contracts for MBTA train crews. These commuter contracts may well have helped stave off Amtrak's elimination a few days earlier.

We were fortunate to ride with Joe as he was enthusiastic about his work, provided details of highlights of the route, and revealed that he was a second generation railroader. When we noted a scenic pond just beyond Lincoln Town Center, Joe noted "That's Walden Pond" which restored my confidence in Thoreau's idyllic description, as years earlier I had been unimpressed by its more commercialized highway side.

A couple minutes later our train paused in the charming town center of Concord, best known as the destination of Paul Revere's midnight ride and the closest town to the Old North Bridge where the first shot of the Revolutionary War was fired.

After our stops at South Acton and Littleton, the Berkshire Mountains came clearly into view to the southwest as the route began to alternate between rural scenes and views of pleasant communities. At Ayer, we passed an old brick interlocking tower located at the junction with a CSX line and noted that we were now one hour out of Boston. A westbound Guilford freight waited for our passage en route to our next stop, the quaint town of Shirley. A sign affixed to the station shelter advised patrons "Buy tickets at Shirley General Store", which appeared to be right across the street.

Shortly we were back up to 55 mph (earlier the speed limit was 65) as we ran through the center of a rail yard near North Leominster and passed an-out-of service turntable. We reached Fitchburg at 10:14am and used the 14 minute turn to photograph the train and check out the modern intermodal station, which contained a snack stand, restrooms, and waiting area.

Returning to Boston as train # 418, now running in push mode, we picked up business as the inbound run was an all-stops train making 12 intermediate stops while skipping one or two flag stops. Despite the added stops, the return trip consumed only 10 more minutes than the 9-stop westbound run. We arrived back at North Station at 11:53am, enough time to grab a burger and board the 12:15 to Rockport.

The Rockport line branches away from the Fitchburg line just beyond the throat of the station and the adjacent drawbridge. After crossing the marshlands surrounding the Pine and Saugus rivers, the Rockport line passes through the historic town of Salem, home of the infamous witch trials, and traces a path along several scenic inlets and harbors filled with expensive boats. The names of towns along this line, such as Swampscott, Beverly Farms, Prides Crossing, Manchester, and Gloucester, evoke an English heritage. Gloucester is a beautiful fishing village known for its famous fisherman's statue and was featured in the movie "The Perfect Storm". This town and Rockport are located on Massachusetts' "other cape", Cape Ann, a gorgeous area well worth visiting. The platform at Rockport literally is at the end of the line and our train # 117 tied up at 1:26pm. A deli and a Dunkin Donuts shop are adjacent to the Rockport station which allows a convenient midday turn.

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at Mattapan and took a photo of a couple more of the PCCs in operation plus other unique equipment used for maintenance and plowing snow parked in the adjacent yard. We returned to Ashmont, transferred to the red line subway, bade farewell to Adron, Jack, and Rodney, and strolled back to Le Meridien Hotel.

John and I headed back to North Station on Tuesday July 9 via the red and green lines to catch the 9:45am Downeaster to Portland. Business class passengers were welcomed aboard 20 minutes before departure and we selected a pair of seats on the starboard side of the train. The decision to purchase business class seats was easy, as I had received a promotional Guest Rewards coupon for a free upgrade to business class, so I only had to pay the added $8 for John's upgrade. This got us wide seats with plenty of leg room, fold out leg rests, free USA Today newspapers, and complimentary beverages. The business class section was actually the rear half of an Amcafe car that had coach seats in the forward end, the cafe in the center, and 2 +1 business class seats in the rear. There were less than 20 seats in business class and a curtain provided privacy for the business class section much like airlines separate first class from coach.

Train # 681 departed on time at 9:45am and business class riders were already sipping complimentary fruit juice served at our seats. Five minutes into the trip the conductor took to the intercom and cheerfully said "Welcome aboard from the Portland crew base." Indeed, down home hospitality was the norm on the Downeaster. Our train trekked northward on the Lowell line, making its first stop at 10:06am at a new MBTA station labeled "Anderson RTC". The crew announced this as "Anderson/Woburn" and I learned that service had just begun to that stop as it does not yet appear in the Amtrak timetable or the MBTA map.

Three minutes north of Anderson the Downeaster leaves the Lowell line and sets out on the Wildcat Branch, a 3 or 4 mile connector to the main MBTA route from North Station to Haverhill which runs through Wakefield. That line apparently gets congested, so Amtrak opted for the Wildcat Branch when scheduling the Downeaster. The Wildcat Branch proved to be a slower and somewhat bumpier line than the mainline but provided an interesting squiggle for our route map. I had considered transferring to the MBTA at Haverhill on the return so I could ride via Wakefield until I discovered that the connecting train also runs via the Wildcat Branch as the timetable says "via Low (Lowell) Line". The 8-minute trip over the Wildcat Branch ended at 10:17am and we reached our next stop, Haverhill, at 10:35. There we met a southbound Downeaster led by a converted F40 "cabbage car" and pushed by a P40 whereas our northbound was led by its P40.

Just north of Haverhill the Downeaster crossed into New Hampshire; however, with no waterway dividing the states, the border was indiscernible. We made two stops in the Granite State, Exeter and Dover. On weekends a third stop is made at Durham to serve the adjacent University of New Hampshire. The first stop in Maine was at Wells at 11:44am, marking our first Amtrak foray into the Pine Tree State, though I had crossed upper Maine aboard VIA Rail Canada's now-defunct Atlantic a dozen years earlier.

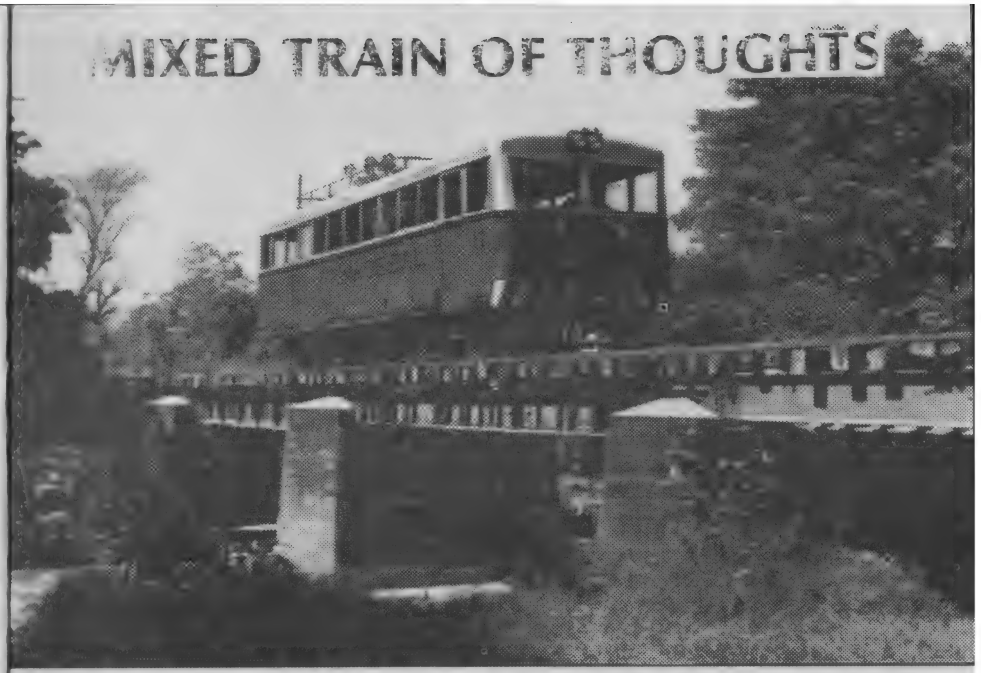
Meanwhile, we dined on specialized turkey wrap sandwiches sold in the cafe by Epicurean Feasts, a catering company used on the Downeaster.

The route continued to be heavily wooded until Old Orchard Beach where the Atlantic Ocean came into view behind several motels and the Wonderland Amusement Park. A weekend Downeaster stop was slated to open there a week after our trip. North of Old Orchard Beach the Guilford rails crossed peaceful Scarborough Marsh before reaching Portland at 12:25pm. We strolled into the modern Portland depot that also serves the Concord Trailways bus line and upgraded our return tickets to business class as we had figured this to cost a net difference of $3 or $4 once the complimentary sodas and iced tea were taken into account.

Business class passengers for southbound Downeaster # 684 were escorted to the train at 1:30pm, a full half-hour ahead of departure. Soon a volunteer car host stopped by and offered information about the train, sightseeing, and anything else passengers wanted to know about the route. The day's second northbound Downeaster was met at 2:24pm between Old Orchard Beach and Saco and soon we overtook a southbound Guilford freight. The timetable lists an 11pm northbound

(continued on page 21

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS



Ferrocarril de El Salvador rail diesel bus No. 17 performs a runby on a short bridge over a creek about 11 miles east of Sonsonate, El Salvador on Jan 17, 2002, during a Trains Unlimited Tours trip. This is the last rail diesel bus operating in El Salvador, and is used only for special charters such as this one. Several other old rail diesel buses such as this one, but in poor condition, are scattered about in old yards in several places in El Salvador, along with many old derelict steam locos. This was one of four such runbys on this trip, which went as far as Sitio del Nino, where we boarded a double-headed steam train and proceeded north on the Santa Ana branch.—Alex Mayes.

The *Capitol Limited* wreck and the safety of Superliners: An analysis by car authority John A. Mills.

Having worked around Superliner cars for over 20 years, including two years at Bombardier plants where Superliner IIs were being built as Amtrak Quality Assurance Inspector, I have a few comments.

Any concern that Superliners are unsafe is totally without merit. As a result of the center of the car between the trucks being only a few inches above the rail and the area above the trucks being loaded with heavy equipment (a/c units, hot water heaters, sewage treatment systems, water tanks, etc.), these cars have a lower center of gravity than a single-level car. I have a file I have been keeping since long before 1971 on passenger train derailments (including many Amtrak accidents since May 1, 1971), which includes several ICC and NTSB final reports on many of these accidents. NONE of these reports have questioned the safety and/or stability of the Superliner or Hi-Level cars. In fact, several reports have commented on the safety and structural soundness of both. Not one Hi-Level car was lost due to wreck damage from 1954 until one stepdown coach was damaged quite heavily at Lawrence, KS, on October 2, 1979. This car could have been repaired (buckled lower level frame and floor); but due to its age it was not feasible. It did not turn over, but climbed an eight foot embankment (trapping the conductor in his office on the lower level due to the floor buckling). Only three Hi-Level Transition Dormitory Coaches out of the whole fleet were damaged beyond feasible repair and all could have been if so desired. One other coach/dorm was destroyed at Mobile, AL, on #2 with wreck, fire, and water damage.

Now for Superliners. Prior to #2 at Mobile, AL, and #59 at Bourbonnais, only two sleepers and one coach had been

scrapped due to wreck damage or fire damage. One of the sleepers burned up due to employees smoking in a deluxe bedroom and the other sleeper was pushed off the right-of-way down an embankment into the river below by the D&RGW Railroad after derailing (but not turning over). The car had been repairable prior to being pushed into the river on order of the president of the railroad. He insisted in getting the railroad reopened and Amtrak sued for the loss and received an $800,000 settlement.

Two coaches were lost at Mobile, AL, after going into the bayou. As far as Bourbonnais, IL, is concerned, none of the cars scrapped in this accident could have been saved. An Army tank could not have survived that catastrophe. In most cases, there is one primary factor that determines if a Superliner or any other type car overturns in a derailment. Do the tightlock couplers at both ends of the car hold and function as designed or does the coupler or drawbar fail? Also after the train derails, how wide is the right-of-way at the point of derailment and how level is the ground in the area? In the cases of the Auto Train and Capitol Limited derailments, both happened where there were deep drop-offs on one side of the track. Notice that in both cases the locomotives got over the sun-kinks, in turn causing the track to move further out of alignment and a car further back in the train was the first to leave the rails.

If the ground is fairly level, the train is not on a curve, and the tightlock couplers & drawbar hold (regardless of speed), the train will stay in line and not jack-knife and come to a stop. However, the Capitol Limited was near a deep drop-off and the Smoking Coach 31537 and Sightseer Lounge 33045 separated due to a drawbar being twisted into. The Smoking Coach went off down the deep embankment into some large trees and was totaled. Most of the injuries were in this car. The two following coaches (34018 & 34053) separated from the 31537 and tried to follow it down the embankment but did not completely overturn (though leaning).

The 33045 Lounge Cafe being derailed appears to have stayed coupled to the diner, and the diner to the two sleepers, and the sleepers to the transition sleeper. All were dragged by the two locomotives and baggage car and were tipped over as a result of the couplers not failing. This is far better than having the couplers failing and the cars jackknifing into each other as in the case of #59 at Bourbonnais.

One final thought on the Capitol Limited derailment--it appears to me that the shoulder of the fill (embankment) in the area was not wide enough and had been compromised. This was because of not enough ballast being in place in the direction the sun kink moved the rails. In my view CSX needs more sanctions from the FRA and NTSB on track maintenance.

As Bill Pollard has pointed out, near Hope, AR, No. 21, The Texas Eagle derailed at speed on straight level terrain and track. Everything worked as it was designed to, and the train came to a stop, coupled and in direct line, with only minor injuries. A TGV did the same thing in France at 180 mph after hitting a short wash-out and continued off the rails for 1 1/2 miles with only minor injuries. Failure of only one coupler or draw bar can cause a mess in incidents like these. Once the cars become uncoupled all sorts of weird things can happen. If a Superliner derails, in most cases it will slide on its belly and come to a stop and very seldom overturn. A single level car does not have that advantage. Most everything under the bottom of the car is destroyed and it can overturn in some cases. Survival in a Superliner is far greater than any air, land, or sea vehicle I am aware of in case of an accident. I have traveled over 500,000 miles aboard Superliner-equipped trains and have always felt safe and secure.

Amtrak

The Washington Post ran a poll Jul 26-30 and reported it Aug 5. Summarizing it, the Post found that 49% favor or lean toward increased funding for Amtrak, while 31% favor or lean toward cutting Amtrak funding, and 7% favor keeping the current funding level.

A job-postings wave for Amtrak Corporate Communications in the first full week of Aug provides some insight into how the overall corporate structure is being shrunk: (To restructure the company, Amtrak will have to redefine and perhaps re-title every management job; all those jobs will have to be posted and all current incumbents will have to apply and interview for a new job, even if it is basically the same job already held. We have seen this happen on the operational level in the past, when Product Line Managers became Product Line Directors and then Assistant General Managers.)

Without the benefit of organization charts or additional information, an examination of what has been posted for Corporate Communications reveals:

Two Director level positions, one for Employee and Customer Communications and one for Media Relations. The former has five reports and the latter has eight (Band zone D1, which is roughly equivalent to old Product Line Manager level).

The next level down shows each group has an "Officer" position (band zone C2, just below Service Manager level). The Employee & Customer group has slots in Chicago, L.A. and Washington. The Media Relations Group has slots in Oakland, Chicago and Washington (2).

Next is Specialist position (band zone B2). The Employee group has one in Washington and the Media Group has one in Chicago.

There are also a couple of Administrative Assistant positions in Oakland and Washington.

If the structure of this group is like that of the Planning Department under Gil Mallery (that department's complete organizational chart *has* been revealed), there probably is a Senior Director or Assistant VP reporting to one of the Vice Presidents (who in turn reports to President David Gunn).

If this is all there is, it represents a large decrease in staffing, especially if every department is reorganized with a similar structure. The former Intercity Customer Communications group alone had a Manager and three or four Specialists. Also, this appears to represent a push "down the ladder" for each job.

Amtrak says there will be new job postings each day for the next few weeks, so those who can access them may be able to get clues about how each department will be structured, by keeping track of all of them.—Gene Poon.

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Texas supporters have a new plan for high-speed rail in the Lone Star State. This is called the "T-Bone" because of its shape, connecting the cities of Dallas, Ft. Worth, Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Bryan/College Station and Killeen. The plan is not unlike the failed 1993-4 effort to form the Texas Triangle. The new plan would involve 530 rail miles rather than the 790 of the Texas Triangle plan, for a cost saving. Supporters expect private sources to fund the project, which would serve 70% of the Texas population, as well as 10 airports, 15 universities, seven military bases and the Port of Houston. They have not yet estimated the cost. The Texas Triangle was estimated at $5 billion or more.

New Amtrak promotion was announced in an Aug 14 release:

"Whether it's a late summer beach getaway or an autumn football game, Amtrak can get you there -- for less, and with service to more than 500 destinations coast-to-coast, chances are, Amtrak goes where you want to go.

"With the 20-20-20 promotion, passengers can enjoy a 20 percent discount on Amtrak travel when booked online for a limited time -- just 20 days. And, by logging onto www.amtrak.com, visitors can register to win $20,000 in free Amtrak travel. Amtrak will select two winners daily for 20 days and each winner will receive a $500 travel award...

"For a limited time – just 20 days from August 14 through September 2, 2002, Amtrak is offering a 20 percent discount when passengers book their travel through www.amtrak.com. Reservations must be made a minimum of 3 days prior to travel and are good for travel from August 17 through November 15, 2002.

"The 20-20-20 promotion is perfect for families planning a fall trip as this promotion can be combined with Amtrak's everyday child's discount. That means up to two children, ages 2 to 15 may accompany each fare-paying adult at 50 percent off the discounted fare.

"Also with the 20-20-20 promotion, Amtrak Guest Rewards members can earn double points just for booking their travel online. With double points, members can earn even more valuable points towards Amtrak travel and other program rewards such as hotel stays and airline miles. To become a member, just log onto www.amtrak.com and click on Frequent Travelers.

"For the 20-20-20 promotion, tickets are non-refundable once purchased.

Other restrictions and blackout dates, including the Labor Day holiday weekend, do apply. The promotion is not available on Acela Express, Metroliner, and Downeaster (Maine) services. Reservations are required and must be booked online to receive the 20 percent discount off the best available fare. This promotion cannot be combined with other discounts with the exception of the child's discount. When booking online, customers should enter discount code H231 when prompted to receive the 20 percent discount."

AMTRAK

The Alaska Railroad might obtain more cars, as it finds ridership increased somewhat from last summer. Through June, there were 2500 more passengers than in last year's period. Most of the increased ridership is on the Grandview train, which started up in 2000 after nine cars were purchased from Florida. The train carries travelers from Seward to Anchorage and return. Some passengers are being turned away on that route. The ARR said it might purchase three single-level dome cars from the BC Railway. The ARR's passenger revenues in 2001 were $14.2 million, and that is projected to go to $14.9 million this year. Ridership should total about 500,000 this year.

Holland America Line Westours will replace two bi-level dome cars with four larger cars. The ARR doesn't want to buy the two, however.

Eurostar CEO David Azema reportedly will retire Sep 2. France's national railroad SNCF, a 30% holder in Eurostar, wants to take over from the British and Belgian holders and make Eurostar a part of the French TGV system.

Transportation Appropriations bill, not yet completed in Congress, is said to include, at least in the Senate version, a sum of $1.5 million for an Amtrak intermodal station in Niagara Falls, near the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge. The Customs House nearby will be incorporated into the project. Funds are for purchasing the land and performing various studies.

Kansas City Union Station is in need of more money because of high operating costs and insufficient revenue from its attractions such as Science City. Station officials plan Project Silverstreak to raise $203 million, some of it from tax sources. Some of the funds would go to complete the Amtrak facility.

The Acadian Railway's summer-only excursion train between Montreal and Saint John, NB, with 2-day stopovers in Greenville, Maine has been hit by vandals, with several windows shot with pellet guns, and an attempted break-in on the diner. The train, which runs two trips weekly, began operation in June. (See also www.acadianrailway.com.)

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The discovery of a crack in a bracket that anchors a yaw damper, a device designed to prevent locomotive wheels from "hunting", or moving side-to-side, in an Acela power car undergoing routine inspection, led Amtrak to order reduced speed on the trains on August 12, while setting out to inspect other Acela power cars.

Further inspections found the same cracking in 14 of the 18 trains that Amtrak has so far accepted. It was also found later in one HHP-8 locomotive, a related type of electric locomotive that hauls conventional trains, also built by Bombardier, the Acela equipment manufacturer.

Amtrak reduced Acela service by using only those trainsets found to have no cracking. But on August 15 all Acela Express service had to be cancelled because of the problem, and Amtrak was substituting the older conventional trains that the Acela had displaced. This move, of course, meant slower trips, and the number of Corridor trains available to the public was reduced from 140 to 115.

(The actual count of trains available in the Corridor was less than the above figure that Amtrak supplied, because the latter included Eastern trains outside the Corridor itself—all trains that were formerly in the NEC Business Unit.)

In an August 16 editorial, the New York Times said in part, "As the Acela's problems rekindle questions about the competence of Amtrak, they also underscore important truths for Congress to consider as it grapples with the future of passenger rail operations in America. The first is that we are seeing the consequences of inadequate investment in rail infrastructure. Congress and Amtrak's previous management subscribed to the fiction that unlike any other railroad in the world, or any other form of transportation in this country, passenger train service in the United States could become self-sufficient."

The Times also called upon Amtrak and manufacturer Bombardier to "work together to address all design flaws, and do so quickly."

Actually, Amtrak was considering reducing the number of Acela Express runs before this mechanical problem cropped up, because of other unreliable features of the train, such as curved toilet doors that will not close or open. Amtrak president David L. Gunn told Washington Post writer Don Phillips that "The train is causing us a lot of trouble. I'm not going to order any more of those." Gunn had been talking of removing proportionately more Acela trains on the NY-Washington run and leaving more available for the NY-Boston route because travelers could save more time on the Boston leg, saving only 15mins on NY-Washington by using the Acela.

Gunn set his men working as fast as possible to fix the affected trainsets and get them back into service, while Eastern media outlets were becoming very upset, as undoubtedly passengers were, over the sudden reduction in NEC service.

Boston's "Big Dig", the massive Central Artery highway project that is consuming $8.5 billion in federal money, will be finished, it is predicted, in about 29 months, and when it is, various officials in Boston will want another big project to pump money and wages into the local economy. The Boston Globe reports that two big projects they anticipate are the MBTA Silver Line (see p. 5), hotly opposed by rail transit advocates, which would cost $1 billion; and a Massachusetts Turnpike "slingshot" ramp project, at $100 million.

Emergency supplemental appropriations bill H.R.4775, which included $205 million for Amtrak to use through Sep 30, was signed into law Aug 2.

Congress is currently on summer recess having left without passing the DOT aproriations bill, which in the Senate version has $1.2 billion for Amtrak. NARP reported, "...much work remains to be done, given opposition to it in the House and the Bush Administration. Also working against us is the fact that the compromise that trimmed down the supplemental appropriations bill, enabling its passage, included cutting homeland security money that the Administration wanted and will continue to push for in the 2003 appropriations bill." The key message for all legislators, NARP said, is "Get $1.2 billion for Amtrak in fiscal 2003."

Also on hold is the Senate's S.1991, the National Defense Rail Act. NARP said that as of Aug 2 it had 39 sponsors. The bill "is an Amtrak and high-speed rail authorization bill that goes the furthest towards proposing stabilization and expansion of passenger rail service nationwide", NARP said.

NEWS IN THIS ISSUE IS UPDATED THROUGH AUGUST 16, 2002. Contributors to this issue not otherwise identified include Robert Abraham, Alan Feinstein, Dan Lovegren, Gene Poon, Ray Saunders, Barry Steinberg, Ed Von Nordeck and Walter Zullig.

RAIL FANTRIPS

Aug 31: 5th annual free train-watchin', watermelon bash. By AAR bus from 4677 Lansdowne & Kirkwood Atk sta. American Ass'n of Railroaders Inc, 4351 Holly Hills Blvd, St Louis MO 63116. Lvs noon, back about 5pm.

Sep 28 & 29: Farewell 1522 Steam Train Excursions. For full details, contact American Association of Railroaders, Inc., 4351 Holly Hills Blvd, St Louis MO 63116-2255. Phone 314-752-3148. Or visit on the Web www.aar-therailroaders.org.

Oct 10-19: Autumn Splendor. Chicago to Vancouver & San Diego. Jasper, Banff Ntl Park, Toronto. Early bookings incl cruise Vancouver-San Diego. $2495 up. Train Holidays, 3075 Citrus Cir, Suite 220, Walnut Creek CA 94598. 800-543-2846.

Dec 14: 34th Street Express, spec Amtrak train Boston-Providence, express to NY Penn, return by 11pm. Optional Radio City Xmas Spectacular or narrated tour of lower Manhattan. $75. Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 or e-mail to rtn@trainweb.com.

When you move, please send RTN your *old* and *new* addresses. Please send them in advance of moving. Or e-mail the information to RTN at rtn@trainweb.com. Thank you!

CARS & CONSISTS

***Pennsylvanian,** train 43, Toledo OH Aug 4: engines 128 & 177 (P42s); cars 1448 MHC, 20250 café, 25112 & 21094 coaches, private cars 800640 "Pacific Union" ex-UP 10-6 slpr, 800712 "Silver Quail" ex-CBQ 6-dbr, 5-cmpt slpr, 800644 "Henry Hudson" ex-PRR buffet, & 800726 "Royal Street" ex-L&N 5-bdrm, buffet obs, express cars 74093 & 74051 Express Trak to L.A., 71138, 71135, 71127, 71018 & 71022 empties to Chicago, 71004 & 71264 to Dallas on train 21, 71066 to L.A. on train 3, 70031, 70042, 70046, 71240, 71275, 71062, 71171 & 71108 empties removed at Toledo, RoadRailers 462997 & 460008. (Four priv cars were on a circle tour Chicago-D.C. via train 90, stayed in D.C. 3 days, then to Phila 2 nights. Cars were returning to Chicago on #43; train ar 25mins late, left 1hr, 30mins late.)—George Danchisen.

American Public Transit Association Rail Conference Special, operated by MARC and Maryland Transit Administration, June 9: engines 67 & 65; cars bi-levels 7817, 7895, 7821, 7845*, 7809, 7824, 7852*, MARC 1 (round-end obs, ex-NYC 48). (*=cab cars with restrooms.) Train left Baltimore 8:03am via Laurel, Silver Spring, Point of Rocks; ar Frederick 9:48am (sched. 10am); lv Frederick (3.5-mile backup move to Frederick Jct) 12:02pm, via Ellicott City (old main line), ar Baltimore 2:32pm.—John Morris.

***Enterprise,** VIA Rail train 50, Toronto ON May 31: engine 6424 (F40PH); cars 4109, 4105, 4112 & 4121 coaches, 8215 "Chateau Le Moyne" slpr, 8208 "Chateau Dollier" slpr, 8709 "Laurentide Park" dome-obs-slpr. Left Toronto 1-2mins late, ar Montreal 10-15mins early.—Bill Engel.

***Crescent,** train 19, Newark NJ Jul 7: engine 923 (AEM-7AC); cars 1506 MHC, 1763 bag, 2523 (ex-"Pine Lodge") crew dorm, 62006 "College View" & 62005 "Cape View" slprs, 8554 diner, 28024 "Philadelphia Club" smoker/dinette, 25072, 25042, 25084, 25008 & 25010 coaches, 1760 mail/express. Same, Jul 15: engine 604 (E60); cars 1505 MHC, 1763 bag, 2523 crew dorm, 62033 "Mystic View" & 62016 "Lake View" slprs, 8502 diner, 28022 "South Bend Club" smoker/dinette, 25077, 25101, 25050, 25055 & 25054 coaches, 1731 mail/express.

***Vermonter,** train 54, Newark NJ Jul 13: engine 906 (AEM-7); cars 82503, 82506, 82501, 82511 coaches, 48151 business/dinette, 1801 bag with logo, 1536 MHC.—Jim Langan.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"'The dispute [between Amtrak and Bombardier] is aggravating everyone,' said RePass, based in Washington. 'The (Acela) trainsets, when they're operating, are beautiful. This is a great big gorgeous Ferrari with some teething problems. The public loves it, it's selling out constantly, but they do have to be made reliable.'"

—National Corridors Initiative president Jim RePass, quoted by Canadian Press Aug 11.

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB***

"Mr. Bush has a high frequency hearing loss in both ears from 4,000 to 8,000 kilohertz that is unchanged from last year's examination. Mr. Bush's hearing is excellent in the frequencies for speech, the doctors said. They also said that the degree and frequency involved do not affect normal conversation."

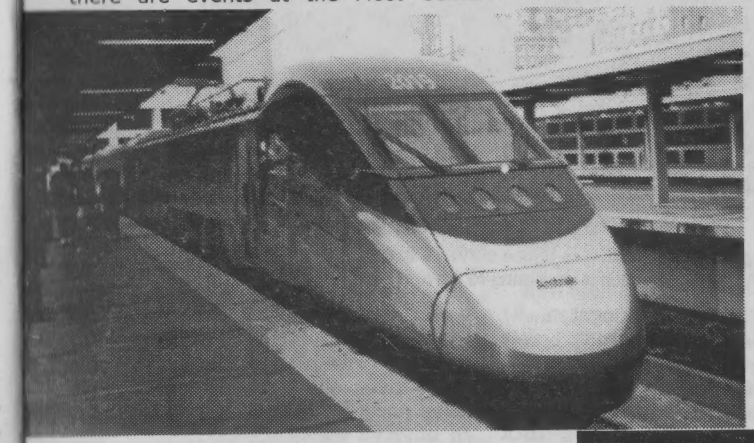
—Lawrence K. Altman in New York Times Aug.7.

(They certainly don't, even when you shrilly clamor for higher Amtrak funding, but then even cats and dogs can't hear in the 4,000,000 to 8,000,000 hertz range.)

GUEST REWARDS TRIP

(continued from page 14)

train from Boston to Portland, which I assumed was mainly a positioning move; however, our conductor advised me that it often fills to capacity especially where there are events at the Fleet Center. Such would be the case on this particular night as there was a large concert at the Fleet Center which would end right about at departure time. Fortunately, we would be in our hotel room at that hour.

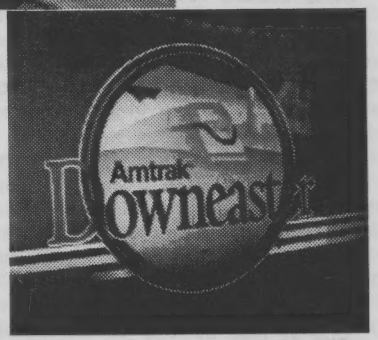


Southbound *Acela Express* 2157 prepares for departure from Boston South Station on July 10. This is the rear of the train, showing power car 2019.

Below, F-40 "cabbage" car on the *Downeaster* bears a logo on its side.

The trip back to Boston passed quickly and we enjoyed the sound of the F40 horn as the business class seating was directly behind the "cabbage" unit. Adding to the old-time railway sound was the clickety-clack of jointed rail on the Wildcat Branch. The homeward commuter rush was about to begin as we arrived at North Station at 4:39pm and numerous MBTA trains lined every available track. Once more we were glad for the convenience of our hotel as the subway ride and short walk had us back in our room by 5:15.

Wednesday, July 10 brought an early taxi ride to South Station to await the 8:15am Acela Express to Washington. We deposited our luggage with a red cap and settled into the tasteful Club Acela where pastries, juice, and coffee awaited first class passengers. We would travel first class on this segment as our original plan had been to take a sleeper aboard the Twilight Shoreliner the prior night. However, shortly after our Guest Rewards tickets came in the mail, Amtrak pulled the plug on the Shoreliner's sleeper and the Guest Rewards department agreed with my assessment that we should be reaccomodated in Acela Express first class. Although I found it odd that Guest Rewards points only give you one-way travel, it still was nice to know that our entire trip from Boston to Tallahassee, FL would be free and in first class space.



The red cap boarded us ahead of other passengers and we selected facing single seats with a table in between John and me. Departure was right on the money and the first class car was only about 40% full. The car never was more than about 2/3 full at any given point in the trip. As we left Back Bay station at 8:21am, continental breakfast was served at our seats and we had a choice among three entrees. Inbound commuter traffic was heavy and we met three MBTA trains within a 7-min period just before the stop at Route 128. Our first class car was at the rear of the train with only the trailing power car behind us and the ride seemed noticeably rougher than on the northbound trip. For the first time in all of my rail travels, I almost felt queasy.

We reached our maximum speed of

The Fitchburg MA station provides a nice curved aspect for photographing trains. This is MBTA train 418, which is preparing to leave for Boston.

150 mph at 9:10am near Kingston, RI then soon "slowed" to 138 mph. We crossed the Thames River and paused at New London, then picked up scanner transmissions from the dispatcher that the drawbridge at Shaws Cove was stuck open and a repairman should be on-site within 15 minutes. This information was conveyed to passengers as it should be whenever there is a major delay to a train. Per dispatcher orders, we backed down a few car lengths to clear a highway crossing, though about this time southbound Acela Regional # 171 arrived from Boston and again fouled the street. Shortly, it too backed down to clear the grade crossing and it would have been an interesting sight to see these two trains side-by-side at New London. While we waited, we watched ferry boats depart from their docks right outside our window. As promised, we were underway at in just 16 minutes at 10:06am. The beautiful Connecticut coast flashed by as we worked our way through Niantic and Old Saybrook. This was prime beach season in New England and the strand was relatively crowded with temperatures near 84.

Metro-North territory brought several slow orders as it did on our northbound trip but the ample leg room and quiet of the first class car made the slow going comfortable. The approach to New York over Hell Gate Bridge offered a clear glimpse of the New York skyline, which is once again dominated by the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building as it was before the construction of the World Trade Center. The stop at Penn Station consumed 18 minutes and was followed by lunch served at our seats as we cruised through New Jersey. The large Acela Express windows permitted us to observe sights we had never seen on numerous trips over the Northeast Corridor when we had to look out of the small Amfleet windows.

Departing Philadelphia we noted the southbound Silver Star about to leave for Florida. We would catch that train in Washington and it was comforting to know we would now be ahead of it as we were about 45mins late. The Susquehanna, Bush, and Gunpowder Rivers gleamed in the afternoon sunlight as we continued our trek through Maryland. Arrival in Washington came at 3:35pm and we cooled our heels for awhile in the Club Acela, which I still call the Metropolitan Lounge.

The southbound Silver Star, train # 91 was ready to receive sleeping car passengers 25mins before its on-time 4:40pm departure. Our sleeper, line number 9111, was the second of three Viewliner sleepers in revenue service on this trip. The Star now regularly carries three sleepers, which contradicts the equipment shortage rationale for removing the lone sleeper from the Silver Palm (now known as the Palmetto). The third sleeper car line on the Star necessitates four cars while the Silver Palm's sleeper car line required one less car. This curious move has left the Tampa Bay area without direct sleeper service and has eliminated a popular schedule option for South Floridians as well as persons in the Carolinas.

Our car attendant Richard had served us on prior travels and was efficient and pleasant in doing his job. Unfortunately, the effects of deferred maintenance were evident the moment we entered our assigned room # 1 in sleeper "Bay View". The pulldown privacy shade designed to cover the window in our room's door was all twisted up and could not be lowered all the way. To say this presented a tacky appearance would be stating the facts mildly. The room's other hall window's pulldown shade was stuck in the raised position. Both windows had been retro-fitted with sheer draperies that would not sufficiently darken the room and that would not provide privacy when using the commode as these drapes were not fastened at the bottom. Additionally, one of the room's circulating fans was broken and the curtains that covered the exterior lower window were held to the drape pulls with bailing wire, though this was not a big issue. The twisted door shade appeared to have been that way for quite some time which raised the question why nobody had fixed this at the Hialeah maintenance base.

Richard promptly informed the conductor, the room was bad ordered, and we were moved across the hall to room 2 which had been reserved by a no-show. Signs of deferred maintenance were evident elsewhere as the attendant's room had been bad ordered with a broken toilet and the temperature at the "A" end of the car was noticeably warmer than in it was for rooms 3-12, especially in the hallway. Fortunately, as I always carry an electric travel fan, we were able to make do. Meanwhile, sleeper "Island View" Bedroom H had duct tape holding the mirror in place on the outside of its room door and duct tape covered something below the car's linen closet. Some of the stick-on letters were missing from the car names on the vestibule doors and some of the plastic buzzer buttons were missing above some bedrooms' hall doors.

More signs of budget cutting could be seen in Richmond as a dining car crew member and one of the car attendants had to maneuver the platform potable water hoses to add water to their cars. In the past this function was handled by ground crews. Another problem that has affected Viewliner cars is their lack of luggage space for the standard bedrooms. Large suitcases will not fit in the rooms' overhead shelves and there is no community luggage rack as there is in Superliner cars. With many stations no longer accepting checked baggage, there is no choice but carrying these items on board. In many cases, the shower room is used for baggage storage, which inconveniences persons wishing to use that facility. Fortunately, with two rooms bad ordered, Richard found space for everyone's bags. With added duties and the annoyance of having to deal with maintenance problems, the entire crew was exceptionally courteous and cheerful toward passengers.

Dinner was finished by the time we departed Richmond at 6:55pm, just as the Twilight Shoreliner pulled in from Newport News. Its sleeper had been reinstated a couple weeks earlier; however, we had decided it best to stick with the Acela Express between Boston and Washington. For dinner both John and I had tender pork chops with a baked potato, and green beans, topped off by apple pie for dessert. The standard Amtrak menu adopted a couple months earlier was now committed to memory: steak, chicken l'orange, pork chops, or seafood. Fortunately, it went into effect after our big February trip in which we had eight dinners in dining cars. This shorter trip could get by without much choice.

The Virginia topography has always interested me as Amtrak crosses tall bridges over the James and Appomattox Rivers in Richmond and Petersburg respectively. Below Petersburg glimpses of small towns such as Stony Creek, Emporia, and Jarratt flashed past our window in the glow of twilight. The former Atlantic Coast Line was left at Selma, NC for a 29-mile run to Raleigh where we gained the rails of the ex-Seaboard Air Line. The line from Raleigh to Savannah via Columbia, SC has always been the route of the Silver Star and I always find it a smoother ride than the "A" Line, which has been beaten up by heavy freight traffic. Departing Raleigh at 10:40pm we were lulled to sleep by the gentle tapping of rain on the window, flashes of lightning across the night sky, and the sight of wet highway pavement reflecting red crossing signals and automobile taillights. This is one of my favorite aspects of sleeping on the train yet so often is missed due to clear weather.

We slept through the night and I awoke only briefly at Savannah to find us running 51mins late, which was fine as that would reduce our layover time in Orlando later in the day. We finally arose as we crossed the border into Florida and had time for a shower before reaching Jacksonville at 8:35am. I went into the station to be sure that the westbound Sunset Limited would operate that day as severe flooding in Texas had caused some recent annulments. Once more we were fortunate as the answer was "yes". With that good news in hand, we proceeded to the dining car for a hearty breakfast.

The run from Jacksonville to Orlando was uneventful save for a quick glimpse of several of the heavily damaged Superliner sleepers from the spring's Auto Train wreck. These cars are now stored on stub tracks beside the Sanford Auto Train engine shop. We detrained in Orlando at 12:01pm, 27mins late. There was enough rail activity to make the wait pass quickly as the northbound Silver Meteor made its stop at 12:30pm and our Sunset Limited provided a photo runby of sorts awhile later as it deadheaded from Sanford to Taft where the engines would run around the train. The Sunset was ready for boarding at 1:15 and we settled into the assigned room 3 in sleeper "New Mexico". Lunch no longer is served departing Orlando, so I used the time before the 1:45pm departure to visit a deli across the street from the station and purchase a couple of delicious sandwiches. I knew the food had to be good when I found the conductor doing the same thing.

Since we were retracing our route back to Jacksonville, I decided it was time for a nap while my son sat on a lower seat and looked out the window. Amazingly, the top bunk in our room had not been made up during the train's extended 2 1/2 day layover in Sanford (due to the Texas flooding). Out of curiosity I checked vacant room 4 across the aisle and found the same condition. Imagine the disgust if you entered a hotel room upon check-in to find unmade beds. With the approval of our car attendant, I went to room 10 to sleep on the cushioned seats that make the lower bed when folded together. For napping purposes, this is more comfortable without the mattress, which is stowed in the top bunk. Upon reaching room 10, I discovered a huge stain reeking of beer spilled on the seat so I called upon our attendant to put clean linens on our upper berth.

Arrival in Jacksonville brought a surprise as we headed straight into the station rather than wyeing the train first. Our conductor could not recall the last time this was done aboard train # 1. We heeded the first call for dinner at 5:30pm and enjoyed delicious steaks with rice and mixed vegetables. Surprisingly, no baked potatoes had been put aboard at Sanford and we got two of the only half dozen steaks that were stocked for the first night. The crew promised these items would be added at New Orleans for those going west. We ate our apple cake dessert while backing down to the wye at Grand Junction where we sat waiting for an intermodal freight to pass on the other leg of the wye. After we backed across US Highway 1, another half hour was consumed waiting for the dispatcher to clear the main line for us.

The trip across North Florida allowed views of a splendid sunset along with another head-shaking transmission intercepted by the scanner. "Jacksonville, please call New Orleans and ask them to have a partition key put aboard tomorrow. There aren't any keys on this train for opening the connecting partition between deluxe bedrooms and we have a couple of families traveling together." I must admit this is a first in all of my travels and imagined that those families were not too happy. The setting sun cast a pretty hue on the Suwannee River west of Live Oak. Darkness fell at Madison while we waited 18mins for an eastbound CSX freight and the dark piney woods enveloped us as we ran off the last hour of our trip home to Tallahassee, 59 minutes late.

Once more it had been a pleasure to ride the rails, especially given the threat of a service shutdown days before our departure. The Guest Rewards program had lived up to its name, finally rewarding us for years of loyalty to Amtrak. We had covered new routes around Boston and actually arrived in Portland, Maine by rail and found the attitude among Amtrak employees we encountered to be commendable. On the flip side, the effects of deferred maintenance raised a red flag signaling a need for attention to this vital function. As we headed home from the station, we vowed to get to work on earning more Guest Rewards points in hopes that Amtrak will still be around.

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